

Rather than deny the permit to General Iron as they should do, the Chicago Department of Public Health has thus far been in a state of denial of the truth of this matter.

I'm Wesley Eplin and I serve as Policy Director at Health & Medicine Policy Research Group and am part of the leadership team for the Collaborative for Health Equity Cook County.

We are in solidarity with Southeast Side residents demanding that Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Dr. Allison Arwady, Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health, deny the permit to General Iron.

Today, we're asserting the values of health equity, environmental justice, and human rights. Southeast Side residents have a human right to both health and clean air. The proposed operation of the General Iron polluter on the Southeast Side would be yet another instance of these human rights being violated.

The City of Chicago's racist pattern of moving polluting industries into Black and Latinx and working class communities contributes to a racist system that does not support life, causes health inequities, and kills people.

The proposed move of polluting metal shredder General Iron/RMG, a known egregious pollution law violator—from Lincoln Park, a predominantly wealthy and white Chicago community, to the Southeast Side, a predominantly Latinx, Black, and working-class community—is a textbook case of environmental racism.

The question is: Which side of history will Mayor Lightfoot and Dr. Arwady be on when this case study is written?

This facility should not operate anywhere in Chicago, and it certainly should not be allowed in the Southeast Side, which is already overburdened by pollution. The City is failing to account for cumulative impacts of multiple sources of pollution.

Mayor Lightfoot has responsibility for whether or not the process of dismantling and redressing structural racism will begin in earnest in Chicago.

Dr. Arwady has the moral imperative and the authority as the public health commissioner to deny the permit to General Iron. Both officials have a choice.

Yesterday, an open letter written by the UIC School of Public Health, [was published](#) and is open for signatures. The letter, addressed to Mayor Lightfoot, Dr. Arwady, and Candace Moore, the City's Chief Equity Officer, forcefully supports the *deny the permit* demand.

UIC School of Public Health's leadership joined with recognized experts in environmental health to express the need to use good public health practice, science, and data. It states that the city's actions are quote, "unjust and unacceptable."

This letter notes major flaws and deficits in the city's health impact assessment process. The department is failing to follow basic public health practice standards for community engagement, even the standards that CDPH claims as their own.

Further, the letter details the health department's failure to consider all relevant environmental data as well as flaws in the health data they are using. Quote: "Daily average PM 2.5 concentrations measured by Illinois EPA's Washington High School air monitoring station are the highest in the region."

This letter says a lot about how severely out of step and alone the Mayor and Dr. Arwady are within the public health community of practice on the General Iron issue.

Also, CDPH and the Lightfoot Administration are running afoul of their own public health plans and commitments to health equity and environmental justice made in [Healthy Chicago 2025](#), the [Chicago Air Quality and Health Report](#), and their recent [declaration that racism is a public health crisis](#).

The significance of this decision goes beyond the Southeast Side. Indeed, it matters to the entire city of Chicago and the broader metro Chicago—and the entire country. The same pattern of environmental racism continues to play out across Chicago and in communities of color across the United States. This is what is meant by the racist structuring of health risks.

So Mayor Lightfoot and Dr. Arwady's decision here is of both city-wide and national importance, and the stakes are high: literally people's lives are at stake.

Federal EPA oversight of this health impact assessment is desperately needed. That said, even if the health department started over and conducted a high-quality health impact assessment, the case to deny the permit would only grow stronger. We've seen enough data to know this permit should be denied.

Structural racism and class inequity kill people. Mayor Lightfoot and Dr. Arwady should fight against the racist structuring of health risks rather than participating in its creation.

Earlier this year, several Southeast Side residents literally starved themselves for weeks on end in a 30-day hunger strike after years of the city and state ignoring their demands that their health, human dignity, and lives be valued more than a company's profits—and to demand that this permit be denied.

The Collaborative for Health Equity Cook County and Health & Medicine Policy Research Group assert that the life of a single Black or Latinx child is more important and worth far more than all the riches or wealth of a corporate polluter.

The truth of this matter is that failure to deny this permit would harm the public's health, specifically Southeast Side residents. Such a failure would worsen health inequities in Chicago.

We're not asking. We're demanding that Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Dr. Allison Arwady do the right thing and deny the permit to General Iron.